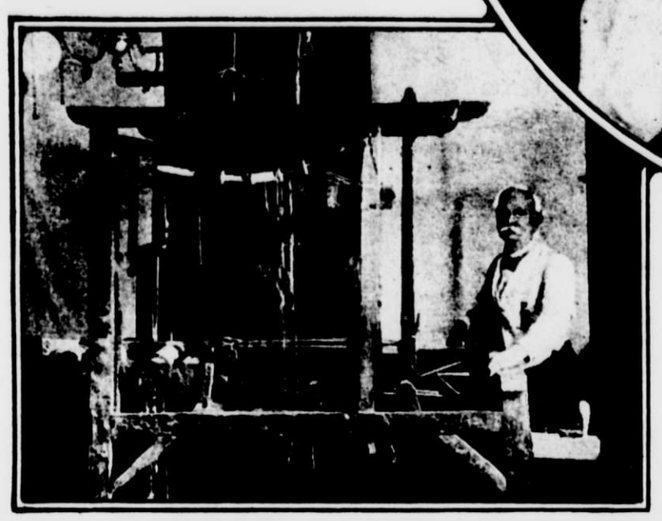
HOPES TO SEE AMERICAN MADE FABRICS LEAD THE WORLD

Mrs. Belle Whitney, Consulting Fashion Specialist, Urges Freedom From Europe's Leadership

Inventor of Her Own Profession, She Advises Manufacturers What Textiles Women Will Buy

Mrs. Belle Armstrong Whitney, America's only consulting fashion specialist.



A relic of Alexander Hamilton's project to establish manufactures. The oldest hand silk loom in Paterson, being operated by Henry England, a 78-year-old ribbon weaver.

THAT American women will be to blame if in the future American looms do not supply fabrics now imported from Europe, is the belief of Mrs. Belle Armstrong Whitney. Her opinion in the matter is worth having, because her business is to deal with such subjects. She has invented a new profession. She calls herself a consulting fashion specialist. Her clients are manufacturers of fabrics and articles of women's wear. So far as she knows she is the only one in the field.

Like most inventions the consulting fashion specialist was invented by accident, out of an existing need in the field of manufactures to know in advance of the season—perhaps a year in advance—what the American woman would wear.

"My first client," she said to the writer of this article, "was a manufacturer of linings, and I recall that he came to see me in a big red automobile to show me his spring line of samples.

"'But where are the linings you intend to make for the light spring fabrics? These are all too heavy,' said I.

"'Are you sure of it?' said he. 'Do you really know what the big dress goods mills are making for spring?'

"I told him I did know and that his linings were not adaptable. I would not let him take my word for such an important statement, and insisted that he let me furnish the proof. So he took me in his big red automobile to the houses that had shown me their dress goods, and they repeated to him precisely what I had told him.

"Another of my early clients was a manufacturer of silks who came to me in great distress over a new silk he had banked on for large sales and which was not selling, though it deserved to sell as an intrinsically beautiful fabric. I helped him to show its adaptability to the women of fashion, revived the wavering faith of buyers in the silk, the retailers began advertising it and sold thousands and thousands of yards. And the silk man remained my client.

"Very much of my work has been with the mills manufacturing fabrics. These mills must work at least a year ahead of the season—that is, they have in progress of construction now the ideas and fabrics that they will put on the market for the spring of 1916. I have been at work this spring of 1915 on problems in colors and weaves and types of fabric whose results will come to you next year, some of them not until the fall of 1916.

"Have you any conception of the interrelations between the United States and Europe industrially and how this horrible war has disrupted them and whirled the entire industrial situation into a tangle? You would have if you had been trying to separate the threads and tie the loose ends together and wind them into a working proposition in some corner of the situation, as I have been doing ever since the war opened. Incidentally I may tell you that my home in the Avenue d'Antin in Paris has been turned into a Red Cross supply station.

"It may interest you to know that the mills that create the ideas in fabrics for Europe and the world, America included, were situated in the northeast of France, where all the fighting has been. I say 'were' because Rodier's silk, wool and cotton mills have been wrecked. From the looms of those three mills, as from the laboratories of an Edison, have come the most important new ideas in fabrics for the last decade. It was Rodier who created and launched eponge and duvetyn and the cascade cloth recently made known to commerce.

"Whatever is now being done in the creation of fabrics is being done in Lyons, in the south of France, and there the style launching mills keep in close touch with the style launching garment making houses of Paris, for the great fashion industry of France is still at work despite the calamities that have overwhelmed the country, despite the fact that such men as Poiret and the entire tailoring world of Paris went to the front and are still fighting for their country.

"Perhaps you do not know that fabric is the foundation of fashion. It is. There is an inseparable coalition between the style launching fabric mills and the style launching makers of garments in Paris, by which fabrics in their first season from the looms are reserved for the great fashion artists of Paris, who conceive from the inspiration of these beautiful new fabrics all their styles of the season. The scale of colors is also a fixed matter of the syndicate of the fabric men.

"In the connoisseur's appraisal of the costly and desirable we find some phase of craftsmanship or manufacture that comes down through history as highly prized by all fastidious lovers of beautiful things. A piece of vernis-Martin, for instance, is a bit of furniture that has its chief value in such a trivial incident of manufacture as the exquisite finish of the varnish of one Martin. Old lace and Venetian velvet, and brocades that we frame in glass—all these are treasures out of the industrial past of Europe. But what are we doing to-day in America to link industry and beauty—real, intrinsic beauty?

"The woman of wealth who appreciates objects of art and old masters and beauty in other departments of her life is content to wear each season fabrics that lack every reason for survival, that come in and go out like a piece of newspaper! And that is why the American mill men are afraid to make what is commercially worth while in fabrics. The American woman of wealth and taste is not educated up to demanding intrinsic beauty in fabrics, intrinsic worth.

"Statistics show that the first requirement of a woman who goes shopping for a new suit is—what do you think? Color! For color is the most conspicuous attribute of a garment. In most cases the woman is tired of the color she has been wearing—she wants something else, to feel new clothed.

"Next she requires style, possibly some special style she had seen or read about in the fashion papers. Third, price is important. Last of all come fabric and workmanship!

"It is not that way with a man. He demands a fabric that will stand up, that will not go to pieces after he has worn it a few weeks. He will invest enough money in the suit only if it has the intrinsic value in fabric and workmanship.

"A woman wants the first effect. She has gone shopping, not to get a needed garment but to get a certain color and style, and she is quite satisfied, irrespective of all intrinsic values, if she has got it. I asked a manufacturer of fabrics if some certain cloths that I especially liked in his men's wear line could not be sold in his women's wear line, they were so highly adaptable to the styles of that season and so fine in weave and quality.

"'No,' said he; 'women won't pay the price. It would not be a practical proposition for the garment man.' I knew he was right.

"But I have a dream——" and Mrs. Whitney smiled across the tea table and arose to lead the way to her desk. "Wait! I have something to show you!" and she took from the litter of papers and letters a bulky envelope and out of it spread some samples of cloth of fine and varied weaves. "These are fabrics made by one mill in America whose products sell in Paris. They are as beautiful as any fabrics made in Europe.

"My dream is of American industries to be. The reason that the American manufacturers have not been able to make more of such fabrics is that they have to support such immense overhead expenses; the high cost of living in this country exacts its toll from them; for instance, higher wages must be paid to laborers here because the whole scale of living is higher than that of the laborers of Europe, so that American manufacturers must have big sales to make profits.

"They must do a bulk business that will support the cost of production and so they must make largely staples. They cannot afford to put on their looms the fine textiles for which there is only a very limited demand.

"But when fashionable women shall take the same pride in launching beautiful things from the looms of America as they now do in launching an American painter, when they take the same pride in possessing examples of beautiful fabrics made on these looms as they have in owning old masters, when they apply imagination to dress and learn to discriminate between real beauty and the style craze of a day and when they stand back of a group of style launching tailors and dressmakers who agree to show the beautiful fabrics each season in a collection of styles for the acceptance of the fashionable woman then will be the beginning of our real fashion development in America, our real industrial to-morrow in the field I represent."

Mrs. Whitney is to have some share in the showing at the Panama Exposition of the beautiful fabrics from American mills, which will be exhibited in the made up garments at one of the most notable fashion displays held in this country. In the interest of her clients she will make a flying trip to the exposition to supervise the opening of this collection of the supreme creations of the American looms.

"I fully believe," she said, "that if I could take the time to tell the women of this country the wonderful story of the American looms and to show them the first crude products in contrast with the superb textiles in wool and silk and cotton that we are able to produce to-day I would be able to make them as enthusiastic as I am over what America has done and what it is possible for America to do with the help of its women in the creating of things of beauty which will be joys forever and build up the industrial wealth and prestige of America as nothing else can.

"It was Alexander Hamilton who was convinced that the United States would never be really free and independent of all other countries until they could manufacture goods enough for their own consumption, and it was he who tried to enlist Congress in support of his views on the subject and the Society for the Establishing of Useful Manufactures. The great centre of the silk industry at Paterson, N. J., is the result of his ideas. And when I saw on one of my trips to the Paterson mills the oldest loom in Paterson—a hand loom made near Coventry, England, in 1765—side by side with the looms of to-day with their enormous production, I was ready to declare that big as Alexander Hamilton's patriotic vision for the Society for the Establishing of Useful Manufactures had been it had come true in the spirit if not the letter.

"But he foresaw then that the larger patriotism must mean the building up of an industrial to-morrow. To-day, more than ever, because of the calamities that have befallen Europe, there is forced upon us the necessity to depend on ourselves for many things for which we had depended on Europe for generations to make for us."

Mrs. Whitney gave this illustration of the responsibility she assumes when she furnishes advice:

"One factory I advised, over a year ago, to meet the growing demand for one of its products by adding to its equipment machinery costing $100,000. Then I sailed for Paris. They cabled me on my arrival that a serious decrease in the use of the goods for which the machinery was needed was rumored and that their own people were inclined to believe the rumor. They asked me if I still held to my original advice to them to go ahead. I cabled 'Yes!' and followed the cablegram with a letter detailing my reasons, based upon knowledge of what manufacturers of allied lines of goods were to do for the coming season.

"The machinery went in. The sales jumped forward and are still increasing, more than justifying my advice. But suppose I had been wrong?"

STAGE NOW BECOMING FAVORITE SHOW ROOM FOR THE FASHION MAKERS

SO great a part does the dress of the women play in the success of a play nowadays that too much emphasis cannot indeed be laid on it. It has even been said that the dressmakers are willing to act as angels of performances in which their dresses are worn, so important is the advertisement from this department.

In the play from which a group is shown here, mannequins wearing gowns made by the same tailor that made the dresses parade up and down the aisles between the acts. This is of course an advertisement of a new kind. The gowns of "Nobody Home," made by Hickson of Fifth avenue, are described as the styles of to-morrow, and not those of to-day. Six of the prettiest are worn by the show girls in the last act. Reading from left to right in the photograph, the gowns and their descriptions are as follows:

Louise White—An afternoon gown of peacock changeable blue taffeta. This is made with a tunic, the bottom of which is corded and pleated, as well as the skirt. The sleeves are short, and the front, forming a vest, is made of Persian tulle with straps of the same material as the dress. The band around the neck and the belt, which forms a bow in the front, are made of black velvet.

Winifred Browne—A street gown of purple taffeta. The waist is made of pink chiffon, with a high standing collar. The skirt has four ruffles and three-quarters of the sleeves are made of the same material with ten buttons on each side covered with taffeta. The belt is made of the same material as the skirt, and a large purple flower with green and white leaves adds to the finishing touches.

Ethel Clayton—This is a changeable color taffeta made with a bolero and tunic. The only trimmings are the embroidery on the waist, shoulders, both sides of the tunic and the cuffs, done in different colors, and a fine piece of white tulle around the neck.

Alison MacBain—This gown is made of mustard color taffeta in a coat effect, suitable for an afternoon tea or the street. The waist and sleeves are made of the same color net, with straps of taffeta around the sleeves to form cuffs. The skirt is made with shirred ruffles, giving it a quaint appearance.

Elizabeth Moore—An evening gown of peach color taffeta. Part of the waist and part of the sleeves are of the same color chiffon. There are two narrow black bands across the shoulders, and three-quarters of the sleeves are made of the same material as the skirt, with a narrow cuff to finish. The waist and tunic are made in one, and bottom of the skirt with two very fine accordion pleated [illegible] as the same effect [illegible] sleeves.

Helen O'Day—This [illegible] and white check dress [illegible] The vest, collar and cuffs [illegible] pique, with a band of [illegible] across the throat, form[illegible] at one side, and a belt [illegible] skirt is a plain circular [illegible] wide tucks.